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PROPOSED MEDIUM-TERM PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 1998-2001

Programme 20. Humanitarian assistance

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20.1 The legislative authority for the programme derives from General Assembly resolutions 46/182 of 19 December 1991, 47/168 of 22 December 1992, 48/57 of 14 December 1993 and 49/139 A of 20 December 1994 and Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56, which confirmed and reinforced earlier decisions and resolutions adopted by the Assembly and the Council concerning coordination of humanitarian assistance and emphasized the leadership role of the Secretary-General in responding to natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies. The programme is under the responsibility of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs.

20.2 The overall orientation of the programme is to ensure the timely, coherent and coordinated response of the international community to disasters and emergencies; to promote prevention, preparedness and mitigation measures aimed at the reduction of vulnerability of those affected by such events; and to facilitate the elaboration of policies to guide the work of the humanitarian community and the smooth transition from emergency relief to rehabilitation and development.

20.3 During the period covered by the plan, the focus will be on achieving further progress in the following areas:

(a) Promotion of preparedness and early warning measures to prevent natural and technological disasters and humanitarian emergencies;

(b) Coherent and efficient response to disasters and emergencies through timely consultations with appropriate partners, rapid deployment of inter-agency assessment missions, development of humanitarian strategies, establishment of coordination structures, allocation of responsibilities among agencies and facilitation of humanitarian assistance delivery to those in need;

(c) Strengthening the mechanisms available to support the coordination mandate of the Department, which include leadership of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, administration of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund, and responsibility for the Consolidated Appeals Process;

(d) Implementation of mitigation programmes to include consolidation of the results achieved by the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction;

(e) Formulation and refinement, in consultation with humanitarian partners, of principles and policies that govern humanitarian actions in the context of its advocacy role;

(f) Acceleration and strengthened coordination of United Nations demining programmes.

Subprogramme 20.1 Policy and analysis

20.4 The objectives of the subprogramme, for which the Policy and Analysis Division is responsible, are as follows:

(a) To develop coherent United Nations system policies on humanitarian issues and advocate humanitarian norms and policies;

(b) To promote the formulation and/or refinement of policy on access to and protection of victims of conflict; United Nations system responsibilities for internally displaced persons; humanitarian interface with peace-keeping operations; security for humanitarian staff and supplies in conflict situations; and linkages and transition from relief to reconstruction and rehabilitation;

(c) To expand the database on emergency crises of the Humanitarian Early Warning System and improve linkages between the System and other relevant United Nations departments and agencies;

(d) To strengthen future humanitarian operations by promoting the application of lessons learned from the evaluation of the coordination of past humanitarian assistance operations;

(e) To establish improved and well-coordinated United Nations mine-clearance programmes and to provide them with necessary support; to develop, refine and distribute standard teaching materials for mine-awareness education programmes, including the maintenance and expansion of the landmine database of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs; to encourage and promote development of new technologies for the benefit of mine clearance operations; to mobilize resources for the United Nations Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance; and to advocate support for mine-related action and a comprehensive ban on the production, export and use of landmines through publications, a regular newsletter and pursuit of a strategy to raise awareness of the landmine problem.

Subprogramme 20.2 Complex emergencies

20.5 The subprogramme, under the responsibility of the Complex Emergency Division, focuses on two areas: pre-emergency operations and new complex emergencies.

20.6 During pre-emergency operations, the objectives are:

(a) To expand and improve existing mechanisms for information-sharing within the United Nations Secretariat, with specialized agencies, non-governmental organizations and other humanitarian partners;

(b) To make better use of early warning information and more systematic contingency planning for humanitarian programmes;

(c) To develop further existing standby arrangements with outside providers of emergency staff and equipment to improve both the Department and systemic responses;

(d) To develop a strategy and operations plan for system-wide training, drawing on existing assets such as the Disaster Management Training Programme and the Complex Emergency Training Initiative. This will include establishment of a training programme for complex emergency coordination staff at the Headquarters and field levels with emphasis on coordination skills, improved humanitarian assessment techniques and contingency planning;

(e) To improve synergies and efficiencies between natural disaster and complex emergency staff within the Department by consolidating common services and joint development of standby arrangements.

20.7 In the event of a new complex emergency, the objective is to ensure a quick and adequate response. This includes:

(a) Continued refinements of existing consultation, needs assessment, planning and response mechanisms to act in the initial stages of a crisis while it is still relatively small-scale;

(b) Emphasis on early clarification of coordination structures;

(c) Improvements in the provision of support (staff, financial, logistic) to the Department's in-country coordinators through joint action with specialized agencies and use of external standby arrangements;

(d) Refinement of the consolidated appeal for a specific emergency to enhance development of a humanitarian strategy that supports allocation of responsibilities, requests for resources and transition to reconstruction and rehabilitation;

(e) Increased use of information technologies to obtain and disseminate information on the humanitarian emergency.

Subprogramme 20.3 Natural disaster reduction

20.8 The Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World: Guidelines for Natural Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Mitigation, in particular its Plan of Action, adopted by the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction held at Yokohama, Japan, from 23 to 27 May 1994, and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 49/22 A of 2 December 1994, calls for reducing the vulnerability of populations at risk from natural disasters and similar emergencies through the integration of disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation into development planning at the local, regional and national levels. Within the United Nations system and within the international community, this subprogramme provides the bridge between disaster management and development cooperation.

20.9 The objectives of the subprogramme, for which the Disaster Reduction Division is responsible, are to promote:

(a) The integration of disaster reduction strategies into the national development processes of those countries most significantly affected by natural and similar hazards;

(b) Policy commitment and necessary technical support for disaster reduction practices at the country and regional levels;

(c) The application of national risk assessments as the foundation for disaster reduction strategies;

(d) Community involvement in the planning and implementation of disaster reduction measures;

(e) The provision of access to effective early warning systems at all levels of administrative responsibility as an integral part of disaster preparedness and prevention.

20.10 The Disaster Management Training Programme will also have an important role to play in achieving the above objectives. Guided by the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action, the Training Programme will provide a training and educational tool for the integration of natural disaster reduction into the national development planning process.

Subprogramme 20.4 Disaster relief

20.11 The main focus of this subprogramme is to assist in mobilizing and coordinating international emergency relief to countries affected by natural or other sudden-onset disasters and to develop ways to strengthen international response capacity. Following an arrangement between UNEP and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, this function also covers environmental emergencies when international assistance is not otherwise provided for under existing specialized conventions or programmes.

20.12 The subprogramme is under the responsibility of the Relief Coordination Branch and its objectives are as follows:

(a) The first objective is to strengthen the existing emergency response system for mobilizing and coordinating international assistance. The system currently consists of standby and contingency arrangements with international partners, the United Nations disaster assessment and coordination programme, the project on the use of military and civil defence assets in disaster relief, emergency telecommunications facilities and the central register of disaster management capacities. These response tools will be upgraded and modified to take into account such technological advances and new opportunities as national and regional disaster preparedness capacities develop. The subprogramme will continue its efforts to develop methodology, identify resources, train staff and representatives and strengthen cooperation between assisting and recipient countries;

(b) The second objective is to strengthen logistics support to the field by assuming coordination functions for storage of relief supplies and their emergency dispatch to disaster-stricken areas, and by promoting the development and application of customs measures to facilitate the speedy delivery of humanitarian assistance as well as regulatory measures to allow unhindered transboundary use of telecommunications equipment during relief operations;

(c) In view of rapid industrial development in different regions, coping with technological accidents and environmental emergencies will present a major challenge for future disaster management. The third objective is to meet this challenge by developing an environmental emergency service that will be available to Member States upon request. The integrated United Nations response

capability of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and UNEP, established for this purpose, will be strengthened throughout the period covered by the plan.

Subprogramme 20.5 Humanitarian emergency information

20.13 Timely, pertinent and credible information on humanitarian issues must be available both to the Emergency Relief Coordinator and to the international community in order to permit accurate analysis of emergencies, provide a basis for effective decisions and assist in the development of policy and advocacy of humanitarian causes.

20.14 The objectives of the subprogramme, for which the Information Management and External Relations Branch is responsible, are as follows:

(a) The first objective is to put in place an effective emergency information network system for preventive action and for a timely, consistent and proactive response. To that effect, present arrangements within the Department for the collection, analysis and dissemination of emergency information of an operational nature will be strengthened. The communications capabilities of its Emergency Operations Centre will be developed in order to facilitate access by humanitarian partners to relevant operational data during emergencies. Particular attention will be paid to the introduction, updating and maintenance of specialized emergency databases in the areas of logistics, mapping and financial tracking of donors' contributions in order to support policy decisions. Electronic public information repositories such as the DHA-on-Line programme and ReliefWeb will be developed on the Internet and through other appropriate means to provide wide access to emergency humanitarian assistance information. Regional and local information networks will be encouraged and developed within the overall context of the Department's information network;

(b) The second objective is the formulation and implementation of information and communication strategies to promote the humanitarian action undertaken by the Department and to work in support of specific humanitarian causes. The intent is to ensure that Governments, non-governmental organizations and the emergency management community at large are kept regularly informed of major humanitarian issues, of the work of the Department on those issues and of the technical and financial needs of the Department to pursue its mandated tasks. Public information campaigns on key humanitarian subjects, such as the damage caused by landmines, will be developed. The provision of substantive information to the humanitarian community will be carried out, inter alia, through a carefully managed publications programme. A photographic library will also be developed;

(c) The third objective is to ensure that the best use is made of modern information technology and that emergency information is issued in an optimum, cost-effective manner. Through development and management of office automation tools and telecommunications systems, the Department's electronic document management system will be developed, including the necessary gateways to the Department's external partners and a modern file classification and records management system to permit instant retrieval of key humanitarian information. Particular attention will be paid to the development of standard electronic

information collection and processing procedures, and to the operation and development of telecommunications links between the Department's headquarters and field offices, including staff training in the use of field communication facilities in complex emergencies.

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PROPOSED MEDIUM-TERM PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 1998-2001

Programme 21. Protection and assistance to refugees

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21.1 The overall orientation of this programme is to provide international protection to refugees, to seek permanent solutions to their problems and to provide humanitarian assistance to people of concern to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Assistance is one aspect of international protection and is a means of facilitating it. However, it is the pursuit of durable solutions to the problems of refugees that is the heart of protection and the principal objective of this programme.

21.2 The mandate for the programme is to be found in General Assembly resolutions 319 A (IV) of 3 December 1949, by which the Assembly established the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as from 1 January 1951, and 428 (V) of 14 December 1950 containing the statute of the Office. The Assembly has also called upon the High Commissioner to provide assistance to returnees, as well as to monitor their safety and well-being on return (resolution 40/118). In addition, on the basis of specific requests from the Secretary-General or the competent principal organs of the United Nations, and with the consent of the State concerned, UNHCR provides humanitarian assistance and protection to internally displaced persons (Assembly resolution 48/116 of 20 December 1993). As regards the assistance activities of UNHCR, the basic provisions of the statute were expanded by the Assembly in its resolution 832 (IX) of 21 October 1954.

21.3 The international legal basis for the protection of refugees finds its principal expression in the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. In addition, there are a number of other international instruments of relevance to the protection of refugees, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989. At the regional level, there are also important instruments and declarations such as the Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa of the Organization of African Unity, the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, adopted by the Colloquium on the International Protection of Refugees in Central America, Mexico and Panama and the American Convention on Human Rights.

21.4 The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees will be responsible for the achievement of the objectives of this programme.

21.5 Those objectives are, by necessity, expressed in general terms: refugee outflows, as well as the opportunities to resolve them, are, for the most part, unpredictable. The broad approach to meet these objectives consists of a range of activities, to be pursued with a continued strong emphasis on improving efficiency, transparency and accountability. Notable among these are the following:

(a) The pursuit of comprehensive strategies, in cooperation with States and other organizations, aimed at both mitigating and preventing the causes of forced population movements, as well as finding solutions to them when they occur;

(b) The ongoing development of a legal regime of international protection, in particular through the promotion of accessions to international and regional instruments relating to the status of refugees or otherwise benefiting refugees,

the effective implementation of refugee rights and the promotion and dissemination of refugee law and protection principles;

(c) The further development of contingency planning and emergency preparedness and response capabilities, in coordination with other organizations, so as to respond effectively and efficiently to situations of forced human displacement;

(d) The provision of humanitarian assistance in an environmentally sensitive manner and in such a way that it is supportive of and reinforces development initiatives to the extent possible; in addition, a concerted effort will be made to ensure that in the delivery of humanitarian assistance, the particular needs and capacities of refugee women and the special situation of refugee children will be taken into account;

(e) The systematic follow-up to relevant recommendations in the plans of action emanating from recent international conferences.

21.6 These activities and strategies will be pursued through a range of general and special programmes under the guidance of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in accordance with its terms of reference as contained in General Assembly resolution 1166 (XII) of 26 November 1957.

Subprogramme 21.1 International protection

21.7 During the period covered by the plan, this subprogramme will promote further accessions to relevant instruments, in particular the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol, and, where applicable, the withdrawal of the geographical limitation and other reservations made by States upon becoming parties to the 1951 Convention. A related objective will be to promote the inclusion of provisions favourable to refugees in general international instruments and in national legislation.

21.8 In order to ensure international protection to all who need it, UNHCR, with the support of Member States, will explore the development of further measures that are consistent with fundamental protection principles reflected in international instruments.

21.9 A further objective of this subprogramme will be to ensure the effective implementation of refugee rights, in particular those of refugee women and refugee children, through the widest possible observance by States of internationally accepted standards for the treatment of refugees, especially the fundamental principles of asylum and non-refoulement. This will involve working for the establishment by States of fair and efficient procedures for the determination of refugee status or, as appropriate, other mechanisms to ensure that persons in need of international protection are identified and granted such protection and to ensure that all persons seeking international protection are granted access to those procedures and mechanisms. To assure a more effective response to the protection needs of refugee women and children, another objective will be wider dissemination of the respective guidelines relating to

refugee women and children, and a more concerted implementation of the guidelines.

21.10 As a result of concerns that statelessness, including the inability to establish one's nationality, may result in displacement. UNHCR will continue its activities on behalf of stateless persons. UNHCR will, in particular, actively promote accessions to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the 1957 Agreement and 1973 Protocol relating to Refugee Seamen. In addition, it will strengthen the capacity of interested States to prepare and implement legislation on nationality through technical and advisory services.

21.11 Another objective of this subprogramme will be the promotion and dissemination of refugee law and protection principles, in particular through the training, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and other relevant organizations, and of governmental and non-governmental officials.

21.12 The final objective of this subprogramme is to help achieve permanent solutions to the problems of refugees. In that regard, UNHCR will promote the elaboration of comprehensive and regional approaches to resolve refugee situations and, where appropriate, other forms of displacement. Of the classical durable solutions to refugee problems, namely, local settlement/integration of refugees in their country of asylum, resettlement to a third country or voluntary repatriation, UNHCR will promote the preferred solution of voluntary repatriation of refugees to their countries of origin under conditions of safety and dignity.

Subprogramme 21.2 Assistance

21.13 UNHCR assistance in response to refugee situations embraces the following: emergency assistance, care and maintenance, local settlement and voluntary repatriation supported by reintegration assistance. In the provision of such assistance, the concern of UNHCR is that assistance, where possible, be delivered in such a way that it involves the recipients. In particular, it should tap the potential of refugee women. Where possible, relief should be given in such a way that it reinforces, rather than undermines, local capacities to cope. Another preoccupation of UNHCR is that assistance programmes should not interfere with or work against the return, as soon as feasible, to a process of sustainable development.

21.14 In providing humanitarian assistance, an objective of UNHCR is that it be delivered in an environmentally sound manner. To achieve this objective, UNHCR will closely adhere to the environmental policy adopted at the forty-sixth session (1995) of its Executive Committee, and as reflected in related operational guidelines.

21.15 A further objective will be to enhance the emergency preparedness and response mechanisms of UNHCR, bearing in mind the results of consultations pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56 of 28 July 1995 on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations. In close coordination with the Department of Humanitarian

Affairs, UNHCR will further develop, with interested States, additional complementary emergency resources in the form of government service packages. In addition, UNHCR will give greater emphasis to specific preparedness measures at the country level, in particular through joint contingency planning in-country with operational partners, including provision for the integration of local resources into the planned response mechanisms.

21.16 To strengthen further the effectiveness and efficiency of its humanitarian assistance, UNHCR will establish, during the period covered by the plan, collaborative ventures with agencies having complementary mandates or competencies. In particular, new or revised memorandums of understanding will be developed with relevant United Nations organizations. Such memorandums of understanding will aim at ensuring predictable operational inputs to refugee/returnee programmes by those organizations which reflect their mandates and competencies.

21.17 Another objective under the programme will be to build on the Partnership in Action Declaration and Plan of Action (Oslo, 1994) and improve the partnership process with non-governmental organizations. UNHCR will also aim further to involve its implementing partners, both non-governmental and governmental, in programme planning and ensure that they receive the appropriate training and support to comply with conditions associated with the implementation of projects on behalf of UNHCR. In addition, UNHCR will ensure that procedures are put in place to monitor more effectively such compliance.

21.18 Among the beneficiaries of UNHCR humanitarian assistance, the Executive Committee has underlined the specific needs of refugee women and children. UNHCR believes that a concerted effort is necessary to ensure more effective implementation of its policies relating to refugee women and children in the field, even from the early phases of an emergency. During the period covered by the plan, this objective will be pursued, in particular through the provision of relevant training and related technical support.

21.19 The final objective of this subprogramme will be to ensure that reintegration assistance in support of voluntary repatriation movements is linked to broader recovery and development efforts in the countries to which refugees return. In pursuit of this objective, UNHCR will continue to support the initial rehabilitation of returnee communities through such initiatives as quick impact projects, and will work closely with development entities and international financial institutions, thereby promoting sustainable recovery in the areas of return.